

WELLBEING IN SPORT ACTION PLAN 2018-2023

A PLAN TO IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING FOR
PEOPLE INVOLVED IN SPORT IN NORTHERN IRELAND



FINAL DRAFT FOR APPROVAL BY
THE WELLBEING IN SPORT FORUM



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Sport Northern Ireland

A Statement of Commitment

Sport has a strong and positive role to play in supporting mental health and wellbeing for all. A holistic approach to mental health is critical to deliver real change and no one agency can deliver that alone. Sport Northern Ireland is resolute in its commitment to a collaborative mental health and wellbeing approach, which is why we are recruiting a Mental Health Coordinator to facilitate delivery of an action plan.

We are all effected by the unacceptably high levels of mental ill health in our communities. A mature society recognises that when one member is diminished, it affects us all; the taboo that still exists around poor mental ill-health diminishes us further.

Sport Northern Ireland is driven to develop a sustainable culture in the sporting system that supports the whole athlete. We are committed to building cultural and wellbeing capacity with sports bodies. We will practice within sport what we promote externally, as we commit to the mental health and wellbeing of our staff. This is our commitment, which is most effective with the support of our partners whom we look forward to working with.

Public Health Agency

A Statement of Commitment

The Public Health Agency recognises that sport can play a key role in the health and wellbeing of our communities. Being active is good for both our physical and mental health, and being involved in team activities can create social bonds and friendships. Sport can also provide an opportunity for people to support each other and identify issues that may be affecting someone's wellbeing.

The Public Health Agency is committed to working with Sport NI and other partners to raise awareness and improve understanding of mental health through sport. We recognise that good progress has already been made in this area by a number of Governing Bodies of Sport including for example the GAA Ulster Council, Irish Football Association and Ulster Rugby, and we welcome the commitment behind this initiative as it will help embrace other sections of sport and physical activity.

Foreword

In January 2016, Sport Northern Ireland invited a number of key stakeholders to discuss mental health and wellbeing in sport across Northern Ireland. After a series of meetings and consultations with the sector it was agreed that a **Strategic Action Plan** should be developed to provide direction, focus efforts and create a framework for investment in mental health and wellbeing in sport. The meetings and consultations subsequently resulted in a **Mental Health and Wellbeing in Sport Strategy Group** being formed to lead the development of this Plan.

As the independent Chairperson of the Strategy Group, and as someone with a background in sport and exercise psychology, I am acutely aware of the psychosocial, mental health and personal demands often required of those involved in sport, and the need to provide adequate support from grassroots upwards.

I am determined to see more mental health and wellbeing support for those engaged in sport, at both a grassroots and competitive level, and I know this determination is shared by my fellow Strategy Group members as well as those with whom we consulted when developing this Plan.

Positive engagement with sport is associated with an array of physical, emotional and psychosocial health benefits. Furthermore, sport can provide an ideal context within which to locate interventions designed to enhance personal wellbeing and psychological health. However, emerging evidence suggests that competitive sport, by its nature, can also paradoxically contribute to poor mental health and lead to specific stressors that adversely impact on athletes' psychological health.

This Action Plan sets out a shared vision for how mental health awareness raising and support is crucial to the sustained development of those involved in sport. With the successful delivery of the actions contained within this Plan, together we can make a difference to the lives and shared experiences of those involved in sport in Northern Ireland.

I would like to thank everyone who participated in the consultation events and activities and a huge thanks to the Strategy Group for their hard work, passion and commitment in progressing the Wellbeing in Sport Action Plan 2018-2023.

**Dr John Kremer, Chairperson
Mental Health and Wellbeing in Sport Strategy Group**

Vision and purpose of the Action Plan

The Vision for Wellbeing in Sport:

That everyone involved in sport is aware of the importance of looking after their mental health, and that of others, leading to a healthier lifestyle and positive wellbeing.

We will deliver the Vision by:

Encouraging and facilitating a collaborative approach to increasing awareness and understanding of mental health and wellbeing in sport.

The purpose of the Action Plan is to:

- Give direction to the development of mental health and wellbeing awareness in sport settings across Northern Ireland;
- Encourage strategic and joined-up working to have real impact;
- Agree where the sector would like to be by 2023 and provide a guide for how to get there; and
- Provide a framework for strategic investment in mental health and wellbeing in sport.

Did you know

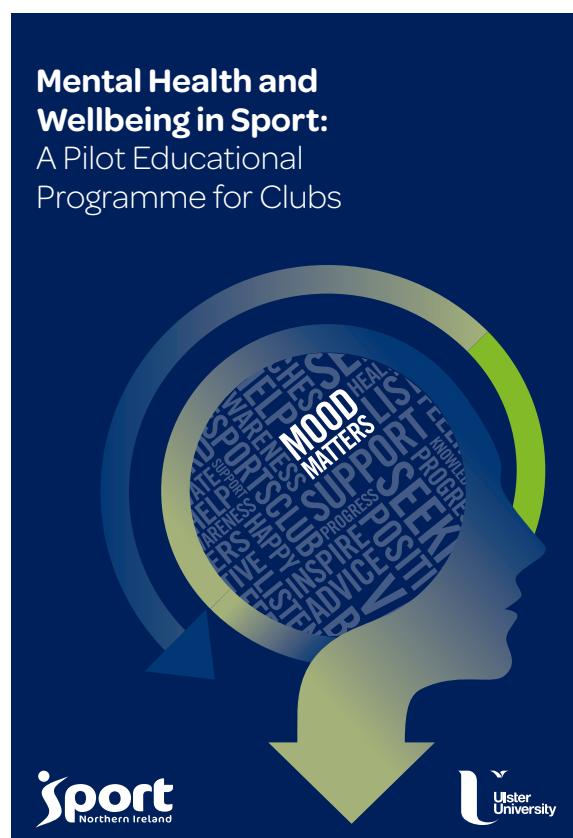
Mental health is defined as “a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community”. (World Health Organization; WHO, 2014)

Background, where we are now, and why we need an Action Plan

Positive engagement with sport is associated with an array of physical, emotional and psychosocial health benefits. Furthermore, sport can provide an ideal context within which to locate interventions designed to enhance personal wellbeing and psychological health. However, emerging evidence suggests that competitive sport, by its nature, may also contribute to poor mental health and lead to specific stressors that adversely impact on athletes' psychological health.

Establishing the Evidence Base

Taking these competing messages into account, and building on earlier initiatives including 'Mood Matters - Mental Health and Wellbeing in Sport: A Pilot Educational Programme for Clubs' (Breslin, et al, 2015, 2017a), in recent years a cross-sectoral interagency Mental Health and Wellbeing in Sport Strategy Group (hereafter referred to as the "Strategy Group") has brought together a range of partners¹ in order to develop an Action Plan for the promotion of mental health and wellbeing in sport in Northern Ireland.



1 These include the Department for Communities, Sport Northern Ireland, Public Health Agency, governing bodies of sport, health professionals, university academics, community groups, representatives from psychology, psychiatry, sports clubs, and mental health charities.

The Strategy Group has already overseen several pieces of work designed to help inform this Action Plan. Recently, this included the publication of the research report, 'Mental Health and Wellbeing Intervention in Sport: A Review and Recommendations'. The report was based on two thorough research projects. First, a global systematic review of interventions in sport that have promoted positive mental health and wellbeing; and second, a regional evaluation of existing local mental health awareness programmes (Breslin, et al, 2017b).

On completion of the report, a recommendation by the Strategy Group was to develop a detailed Action Plan in consultation with the sporting public across Northern Ireland.



Public Consultation and Recommendations

Six consultation events were held between 3 April-10 May 2017 across five venues in Northern Ireland. An open invitation to attend the consultation events was circulated via Sport Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Sports Forum, and coach and talent networks, and was also posted to the public on Eventbrite. A total of 90 people registered for the consultation events, with 83 attending (59% male, 41% female).

Attendees represented governing bodies of sport (15%), local clubs (37%), community groups, voluntary sector, charities, and individuals (18%) or other (30%). See Appendix 2 for further details relating to the public consultation that initially informed 10 recommendations for the Strategy Group to consider in the wider strategic and policy context of sport and mental health and wellbeing in Northern Ireland.

Strategic context

Sport Matters: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation, 2009-2019 is a cross-departmental strategic commitment to sport and physical recreation, endorsed by the Northern Ireland Executive and the Assembly. The high level target for participation includes a focussed target (PA7) - “By 2019, to deliver at least a 3% increase in adult participation rates in sport and physical recreation (based on 2011 baseline)”.

In March 2015, the Sport Matters Mid-Term Review highlighted that “Sport and physical recreation provides personal benefits such as better physical and mental health, high educational attainment, creating better employment opportunities and earning potential”. It also recognised that achieving these benefits requires a genuine partnership approach with elements of work being taken forward by those best placed to contribute together with the pooling of resources and expertise.

This Action Plan consolidates the views emerging from the successful implementation of Sport Matters. It is intended that this Action Plan will make a significant contribution towards achieving not only the ambitions of Sport Matters, but also its successor from 2020 onwards when Sport Matters will be replaced by a new Strategy for Physical Activity and Sport. It also has the potential to deliver against targets within a range of other cross-departmental outcome focussed strategies including:

Department for Communities - Sport Matters: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-2019 which acknowledges the role of sport and exercise in helping to combat stress. The Strategy contains proposals for improving public health, including promoting positive mental health.

Department of Health - Protect Life 2: (Draft) A Strategy for Suicide Prevention in North of Ireland which is a draft new strategy and action plan to reduce the suicide rate in Northern Ireland with a particular focus on directing resources and efforts to the most deprived areas which experience the greatest burden of suicide.

Department of Health - Making Life Better: A Whole System Strategic Framework for Public Health 2013-2023 which builds on the former public health strategy ‘Investing for Health’ and takes account of consultation feedback on the draft framework ‘Fit and Well - Changing Lives’, and a number of other key reports and evidence. Through strength of coordination and partnership, the framework will seek to create the conditions for individuals and communities to take control of their own lives, and move towards a vision

for Northern Ireland where all people are enabled and supported in achieving their full health and wellbeing potential.

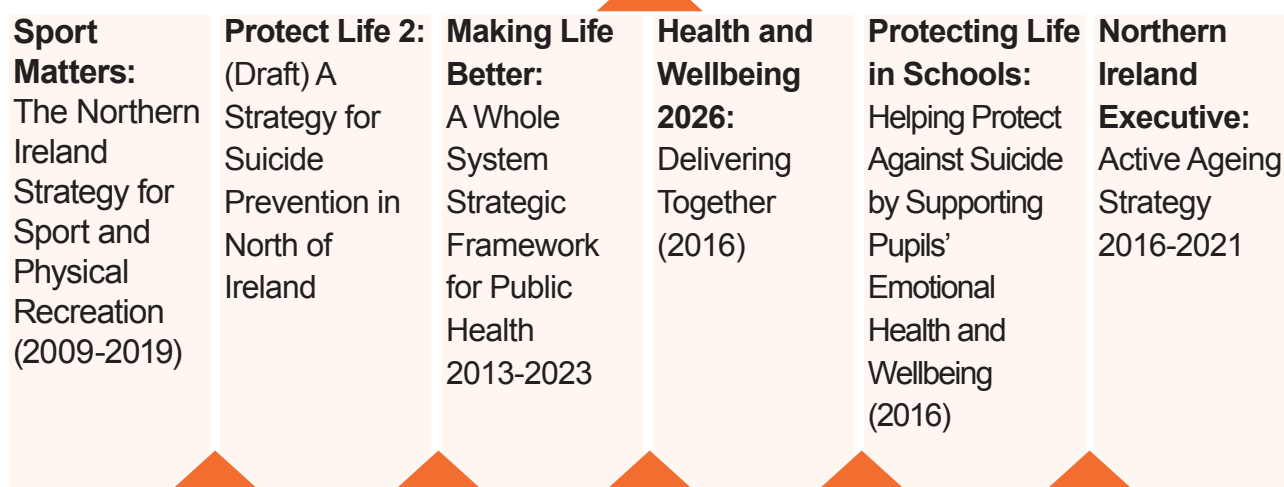
Department of Health - Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together (2016) which is a 10-year approach to transforming health and social care services in Northern Ireland.

Department of Education - Protecting Life in Schools: Helping Protect Against Suicide by Supporting Pupils' Emotional Health and Wellbeing (2016) which seeks to provide support to schools on mental health and wellbeing and focuses on the many positive, supportive measures that schools can put in place to help safeguard the emotional health and wellbeing of their pupils. The programme is delivered under the branding of "iMatter". It is hoped that this advice will support schools in reducing the incidence of self-harm and suicide.

Northern Ireland Executive: Active Ageing Strategy 2016-2021 which focuses on what Departments can add to existing work to make a strategic change to services or programmes in relation to older people. One of the desired outcomes for the Active Ageing Strategy is that older people participate in physical activity.

This Action Plan will demonstrate how a range of organisations will work collaboratively to ensure that everyone involved in sport has been made aware of the importance of looking after their mental health and wellbeing, and encourage a strategic focus for investment in mental health and wellbeing going forward.

Improved Mental Health and Wellbeing Outcomes for People Involved with Sport



Wellbeing in Sport Action Plan 2018-2023

Who developed this Action Plan, and what does the sporting community want?

This Action Plan has been primarily developed by key stakeholders who are committed to supporting and empowering people within the sports sector to have better awareness of mental health and wellbeing.

More than 250 individuals and organisations provided input during an engagement process that included the following: a survey (n=135); one to one interviews and focus groups (n=26); and public consultation events (n=83). Over 50 organisations with an interest and/or remit for supporting mental health and wellbeing took part. These organisations included governing bodies of sport, the Public Health Agency, sports clubs, Female Sports Forum, mental health charities, university students and student support services, and District Councils (See Appendix 2 for further details of those involved in public consultation).

The process of enabling, collecting and managing these views was overseen by a Strategy Group, convened and facilitated by Sport Northern Ireland and independently chaired. The Strategy Group included representatives from across the health and sports sectors along with the Department for Communities, Ulster University and charities. Full details of the Strategy Group membership is included at Appendix 1.

Overwhelming support for the development of this Action Plan was witnessed during the public engagement and consultation process, with the passionate debate and ideas that were generated being crucial in steering the Plan's direction and development.

During the consultation process, respondents were asked how can they be encouraged and facilitated to support the mental health and wellbeing of themselves and others. They were also asked what they would like to see changed or improved for the sports sector. There were a number of themes emerged in their responses, these included:

- Strategy Development;
- Resourcing the Strategy / Action Plan;
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Programmes; and
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Officer.

Appendix 2 provides a bullet summary of consultation responses under each of the emerging themes.

In order to have these themes become “live’ and meaningful the Strategy Group analysed the information from stakeholders and identified four **Action Themes**.



**1. ENGAGE, PROMOTE
AND SUPPORT**



**3. CAPACITY AND
CAPABILITY**



**2. INVEST AND
IMPLEMENT**



**4. IDENTIFY AND
INSPIRE**

What do we hope to achieve by 2023?

Unlike physical health, it can be argued that mental health has not been afforded the same priority by the public, a fact which may in part have contributed to the increased incidence and prevalence of mental health problems in sport. Nevertheless, a body of evidence has emerged, and continues to transpire concerning the public's understanding of and attitudes towards mental health.

Findings from Northern Ireland based population surveys have shown that there is a low level of understanding of mental health. Paradoxically individuals are more likely to offer help to someone who was experiencing a mental health problem, but not to seek mental health support themselves if required (Breslin and McCay, 2013). This unwillingness to seek help was attributed to stigma associated with being labelled as someone experiencing a mental health problem.

Reflecting the persistence of the social stigma associated with mental health and help seeking in sport (Breslin et al, 2018), this Action Plan proposes an aspirational long-term vision and a number of realistic outcomes that will contribute towards achieving our vision for wellbeing in sport.

This Plan will be driven by outcome based accountability i.e. there will be a focus on improving outcomes that will contribute to helping the sporting community promote healthier lives. This will help to ensure that many participants experiencing poor mental health and wellbeing will be better off as a result.

It has been shown that increasing mental health awareness can improve confidence in providing support to someone with a mental health problem. (Sebbens, Hassmén, Crisp, and Wensley, 2016)

Under the Action Themes four higher level outcomes have been identified:

Engage, Promote and Support

Outcome 1: Individuals and organisations within the sports sector are to be supported by interagency structures to effectively support and deliver the Action Plan.

Invest and Implement

Outcome 2: Necessary resources are to be identified and secured to support the full implementation of the Action Plan.

Capacity and Capability

Outcome 3: A Mental Health and Wellbeing evidence-based training network is to be established within the sports sector to effectively increase the knowledge and understanding of mental health and wellbeing.

Identify and Inspire

Outcome 4: Mental health 'champions' are to be identified within the sports sector to communicate healthy messages and encourage help seeking behaviours in sporting communities.

Did you know

Globally an estimated 350 million people are affected by depression, 60 million by bipolar affective disorder, and 21 million by schizophrenia / other psychoses. (WHO, 2016a, 2016b)

**“As a person who has experienced depression seeking help has really helped me, and I would encourage others to do so. It’s hard to reach out but you should do it, it benefited me. Playing football is one of the ways I coped.”
(Football Player, Derry)**

How will we do this?

The public consultation and engagement process consistently identified the need for a coordinating structure to take a lead in facilitating the delivery of this Action Plan. It was therefore agreed that the existing Strategy Group would draw up terms of reference for:

A Northern Ireland Wellbeing in Sport Forum that will create links and provide a networking and information sharing platform between relevant government departments, agencies, etc., along with organisations within the health and sports sectors.

A Wellbeing in Sport Implementation Group that will support the delivery, monitoring and realisation of the outcomes of this Action Plan.

To realise the four outcomes, which will be employed as the primary measures of success of the Plan in 2023, **19 actions and 42 timebound delivery outputs** are set out under the four Action Themes in Tables 1 to 4.

“As a representative of a large governing body of sport, I believe it is vitally important to get behind the Mental Health and Wellbeing in Sport Initiative.”
(Governing body of sport representative)

“Our role would be to signpost people to avail of local services and support; there are many organisations best placed to support people.”
(Sports Club Chairperson, Belfast)



1. Engage, Promote and Support

Table 1: Engage, Promote and Support

| Action Theme | What will we do and why? | How will we do it? | Who will do it? | When will we do it? |
|------------------------------------|---|---|---|--|
| Engage, Promote and Support | 1. Establish structures and associated networks to effectively and efficiently implement, oversee, monitor, and review the action plan. | <p>a. Form a 'Northern Ireland Wellbeing in Sport Forum', with invitations extended to all those involved or interested in the area.</p> <p>b. Establish a Northern Ireland Wellbeing in Sport Forum, with membership profile to be determined by, and reflective of, the existing Strategy Group.</p> <p>c. Form sub-groups with designated responsibility for key themes (e.g. training, research, implementation of plan, etc.).</p> <p>d. Develop a consultation / contact list including all key stakeholders.</p> | <p>Sport Northern Ireland</p> <p>- Sport Northern Ireland - Northern Ireland Wellbeing in Sport Forum</p> <p>- Sport Northern Ireland - Wellbeing in Sport Implementation Group</p> <p>- Sport Northern Ireland - Wellbeing in Sport Implementation Group</p> | <p>By March 2019</p> <p>By March 2019</p> <p>By March 2019</p> <p>By November 2018</p> |

Table 1: Engage, Promote and Support

| Action Theme | What will we do and why? | How will we do it? | Who will do it? | When will we do it? |
|------------------------------------|---|--|---|---|
| Engage, Promote and Support | <p>2. Evaluate existing intervention models in sport, to benchmark and develop best practice procedures.</p> <p>3. Promote best practice and continual research across the Northern Ireland sports sector to strengthen the regional knowledge base and share experience.</p> | <p>a. Engage with governing bodies of sport and specialist organisations working in mental health promotion in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>b. Update mental health and sport intervention literature and evidence on a regular basis.</p> <p>a. Monitor mental health strategies and interventions across sport - regionally, nationally and internationally.</p> <p>b. Scope the availability of intervention strategies locally, and evaluate relevance to sport.</p> <p>c. Provide regular updates and briefings every six months to key stakeholders across the Northern Ireland sports sector, including best practice examples.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sport Northern Ireland - Public Health Agency - Wellbeing in Sport Implementation Group - Universities - Wellbeing in Sport Forum - Wellbeing in Sport Implementation Group - Sport Northern Ireland - Public Health Agency - Universities - Sport Northern Ireland - Wellbeing in Sport Implementation Group - Northern Ireland Sports Forum - Sport Northern Ireland - Wellbeing in Sport Implementation Group | <p>By June 2019 and ongoing</p> <p>Review Annually</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> |

Table 1: Engage, Promote and Support

| Action Theme | What will we do and why? | How will we do it? | Who will do it? | When will we do it? |
|------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Engage, Promote and Support | 4. Support the introduction of practical structures for promoting positive mental health within sports clubs and governing bodies of sport to ensure effective interventions at grassroots level. | <p>a. Aid the establishment of roles within governing bodies of sport and sports clubs with designated responsibility for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health awareness • Coordination of training • Policy development <p>b. Develop a standard policy to aid removal of mental health stigma and barriers to help seeking in sport.</p> <p>c. Consider support (e.g. small grants) to encourage sports clubs to develop resources to raise awareness about mental health specific to sport settings (e.g. mental health promotion, messaging, initiatives and campaigns)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sport Northern Ireland - Public Health Agency - Northern Ireland Sports Forum - Governing bodies of sport - Wellbeing in Sport Implementation Group - Sport Northern Ireland - Governing bodies of Sport - Northern Ireland Sports Forum - Sport Northern Ireland - Public Health Agency - Department for Communities - Northern Ireland Sports Forum - Wellbeing in Sport Implementation Group | <p>By March 2020</p> <p>By September 2019</p> <p>By June 2019 and ongoing</p> |

Table 1: Engage, Promote and Support

| Action Theme | What will we do and why? | How will we do it? | Who will do it? | When will we do it? |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| <p>Engage, Promote and Support</p> | <p>5. Promote the benefits of positive mental health associated with sport participation and performance” as the purpose of the action plan is to use sport as a vehicle to bring about positive mental health through sport, not improve mental health in order to increase sports participation and improve sporting performance.</p> | <p>a. Develop a range of sport-specific materials (e.g. app, website, information cards, etc.) to inform and educate those involved in sport.</p> <p>b. Use Sport Northern Ireland pilot scheme to consider effective delivery mechanisms (e.g. use of Information Technology).</p> <p>c. Consider opportunities for promotion in other sport venues (e.g. gyms, leisure centres, etc.).</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sport Northern Ireland - Public Health Agency - Governing bodies of sport - Department for Communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sport Northern Ireland - Public Health Agency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sport Northern Ireland - Wellbeing in Sport Implementation Group | <p>By September 2019 and ongoing</p> <p>By January 2019</p> <p>By June 2019 and ongoing</p> |

Table 1: Engage, Promote and Support

| Action Theme | What will we do and why? | How will we do it? | Who will do it? | When will we do it? |
|------------------------------------|--|--|---|---------------------------|
| Engage, Promote and Support | 6. Provide leadership to ensure consistency across existing policies, strategies and/or action plans (e.g. Sport Matters; and Active Living: No Limits). | a. Establish appropriate coordinating structures within and between government departments, and involving other bodies as appropriate. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sport Northern Ireland - Public Health Agency - Wellbeing in Sport Implementation Group - Department for Communities - Department of Health | By March 2019 |
| | 7. Input into local community sport initiatives (governing bodies of sport and sport clubs), to raise the profile sport can have in promoting mental health. | a. Engage and influence the action planning process currently underway within district council's to support the implementation of community plans. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sport Northern Ireland - Public Health Agency - Governing bodies of sport - Department for Communities | By March 2020 and ongoing |

Table 1: Engage, Promote and Support

| Action Theme | What will we do and why? | How will we do it? | Who will do it? | When will we do it? |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| <p>Engage, Promote and Support</p> | <p>8. Build linkages with existing mental health initiatives to help integrate and mainstream this work into sport settings in Northern Ireland.</p> | <p>a. Link with existing safeguarding measures.</p> <p>b. Link with ongoing training in schools for young people.</p> <p>c. Link with mental health specialists to support the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depression • Suicide prevention • Addictions • Abuse <p>d. Link with the Public Health Agency's directory of services to help improve mental health and emotional wellbeing.</p> | <p>- Sport Northern Ireland - NSPCC - Child Protection in Sport Unit - Local Health Trusts</p> <p>- Sport Northern Ireland - Wellbeing in Sport Implementation Group</p> <p>- Wellbeing in Sport Implementation Group - Public Health Agency - Sport Northern Ireland - Governing bodies of sport - Accredited Professionals</p> <p>- Public Health Agency - Sport Northern Ireland</p> | <p>By June 2019</p> <p>By June 2019 and ongoing</p> <p>By June 2019 and ongoing</p> |

Table 1: Engage, Promote and Support

| Action Theme | What will we do and why? | How will we do it? | Who will do it? | When will we do it? |
|------------------------------------|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Engage, Promote and Support | 9. Advocacy work, to raise awareness among those who influence decision-making locally. | a. Seek professional advice and guidance on cost effective advocacy techniques. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sport Northern Ireland - Public Health Agency - Northern Ireland Sports Forum | By March 2019 |



2. Invest and Implement

Table 2: Invest and Implement

| Action Theme | What will we do and why? | How will we do it? | Who will do it? | When will we do it? |
|-----------------------------|--|---|---|---|
| Invest and Implement | 10. Establish potential sources of support for governing bodies of sport and sports clubs to ensure the long-term viability of the work. | a. Identify opportunities for governing bodies of sport and sports clubs. b. Provide practical support for funding applications. | - Public Health Agency - Sport Northern Ireland - Wellbeing in Sport Implementation Group | By March 2019 |
| | 11. Produce practical resources / toolkits (e.g. app, website, posters, social media (T-map), talks, etc.). | a. Develop sport-specific resource materials for distribution through governing bodies of sport to sports clubs. | - Sport Northern Ireland - Public Health Agency - Northern Ireland Sports Forum | By March 2019 and ongoing By June 2019 |

Table 2: Invest and Implement

| Action Theme | What will we do and why? | How will we do it? | Who will do it? | When will we do it? |
|-----------------------------|--|---|---|---|
| Invest and Implement | 12. Support the delivery of mental health programmes in sport to ensure quality control. | <p>a. Monitor the delivery of existing programmes across sport through a central register.</p> <p>b. Offer advice on the structure and contents of mental health programmes in sport based on available evidence.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public Health Agency - Sport Northern Ireland - Wellbeing in Sport Implementation Group - Public Health Agency - Sport Northern Ireland - Wellbeing in Sport Implementation Group - Ulster University | <p>By June 2019 and ongoing</p> <p>By June 2019 and ongoing</p> |

Read about programmes and how the Action Plan has contributed to their enhancement and impact

CASE STUDY 1 - STATE OF MIND IRELAND

State of Mind Ireland is an evidenced-based mental health in sport awareness programme aimed at university student athletes. The 75-minute programme was delivered by Ulster University School of Sport in partnership with the UU Students Union and Student Support Services, and funded by the Public Health Agency.

The programme raised mental health awareness in student athletes. Students increased their knowledge of mental health and intentions to self-manage, as well as their wellbeing.

The Action Plan was useful by recognising the importance of promoting evidence-based mental health programmes within a university setting. The programme has been modified now to engage first year students who are non-athletes at Ulster University.



1. ENGAGE, PROMOTE AND SUPPORT

CASE STUDY 2 - GAA MINDFIT

GAA MindFit is an hour-long session based on understanding how our thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and wellbeing can be affected when we face a setback in a sports setting; and how to build on our resilience to allow us to continue to enjoy our successes, the good things in life, deal with the difficult things as and when they happen, and build on our ability and capacity to bounce back (resilience).

Since February 2018 the programme has been delivered across all six counties in Northern Ireland to 420 young people, male and female, between the ages of 13 and 18. Feedback indicated that adults in attendance at the training sessions felt they benefited from the information and skills being taught.

The future goal will be to extend the delivery of MindFit to allow even more local clubs across Northern Ireland to benefit from the awareness created around maintaining positive mental health and building resilience.



2. INVEST AND IMPLEMENT

The background features a vertical gradient from red at the bottom to orange at the top. It is populated with a dense field of small, multi-colored dots in shades of blue, green, yellow, red, and purple. Several larger white circles are scattered throughout, some of which contain smaller, multi-colored dots, creating a complex, layered visual effect.

3. Capacity and Capability

Table 3: Capacity and Capability

| Action Theme | What will we do and why? | How will we do it? | Who will do it? | When will we do it? |
|--------------------------------|--|--|---|--|
| Capacity and Capability | 13. Support the delivery of appropriate mental health awareness training to governing bodies of sport and sport clubs. | <p>a. Support the delivery of suitable accredited training for officers, members, coaches, volunteers, parents and participants.</p> <p>b. Explore opportunities for including mental health awareness as an integral part of existing coach training programmes.</p> <p>c. Consider opportunities for developing a central training resource (e.g. e-learning packages)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sport Northern Ireland - Public Health Agency - Governing bodies of sport - Sports clubs - Sport Northern Ireland - Public Health Agency - Governing Bodies of Sport - Sports clubs - Wellbeing in Sport Implementation Group - Sport Northern Ireland - Public Health Agency - Universities | <p>By March 2019 and ongoing</p> <p>By January 2020</p> <p>By January 2020</p> |

Table 3: Capacity and Capability

| Action Theme | What will we do and why? | How will we do it? | Who will do it? | When will we do it? |
|--------------------------------|---|--|---|------------------------------------|
| Capacity and Capability | <p>14. Ensure quality of training to guarantee that those who deliver training are up to standard.</p> | <p>a. Put in place a quality control mechanism for assessing external training programmes and trainers.</p> <p>b. Develop a register of accredited external trainers.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wellbeing in Sport Implementation Group - Sport Northern Ireland - Public Health Agency | <p>By January 2019</p> |
| | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wellbeing in Sport Implementation Group - Sport Northern Ireland - Public Health Agency | <p>By January 2019 and ongoing</p> |
| | <p>15. Explore opportunities for using sport as an effective delivery medium to improve mental health and wellbeing among current non-participants.</p> | <p>a. Working with partner agencies outside sport (e.g. Health and Social Care Trusts) to identify opportunities for using sports' initiatives to target those with mental health issues but who are not currently participating in sport.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Department of Health - Sport Northern Ireland - Public Health Agency - Local Health Trusts - 11 District Councils - Education Authority - Governing bodies of sport | <p>By June 2019 and ongoing</p> |

Table 3: Capacity and Capability

| Action Theme | What will we do and why? | How will we do it? | Who will do it? | When will we do it? |
|--------------------------------|--|---|--|---------------------------|
| Capacity and Capability | 16. Develop expertise and a training network within the sport sector, to ensure that best practice in mental health promotion in sport is recognised and acted on. | a. Coordinate engagement and partnership working between existing public / private / community / voluntary sector organisations and sports clubs and schools. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wellbeing in Sport - Implementation Group - Sport Northern Ireland - Public Health Agency - Governing bodies of sport - Mental health charities | By March 2019 and ongoing |

Table 3: Capacity and Capability

| Action Theme | What will we do and why? | How will we do it? | Who will do it? | When will we do it? |
|--------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Capacity and Capability | 17. Develop tailored training materials for use specifically within the sports sector. | <p>a. Compile a directory of mental health in sport training programmes and key organisations (informed by Public Health Agency mapping exercise).</p> <p>b. Review existing programmes and highlight examples of good practice.</p> <p>c. Develop case studies of good practice from within sport and make available more widely.</p> <p>d. Use evidence to develop a consistent approach to training and course delivery across the sports sector.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public Health Agency - Sport Northern Ireland - Wellbeing in Sport Implementation Group - NSPCC - Child Protection in Sport Unit - Local Health Trusts - Public Health Agency - Sport Northern Ireland - Wellbeing in Sport Implementation Group - Universities - Public Health Agency - Wellbeing in Sport Implementation Group - Sport Northern Ireland - Public Health Agency - Sport Northern Ireland - Wellbeing in Sport Implementation Group - Governing bodies of sport - Universities | <p>By March 2019</p> <p>By June 2019 and ongoing</p> <p>By June 2019</p> <p>Ongoing</p> |

Read about programmes and how the Action Plan has contributed to their enhancement and impact

CASE STUDY 3 - ACTION MENTAL HEALTH

Action Mental Health delivered Mindset training to Soccer NI.

Street Soccer NI is a football project set up for the disadvantaged groups of society such as the homeless, people with addictions and/or mental health issues, refugees, asylum seekers, and long-term unemployed. Street Soccer NI aims to bring positive change to people's lives using football. The group received training from Action Mental Health over two weeks.

Feedback from the group was that they had learned "Not to bottle stress up, there is always help" and "It's ok to not be ok". All participants reported to feeling more confident about seeking support for themselves or others as well as having an improved knowledge and attitude towards mental health.



3. CAPACITY AND
CAPABILITY



4. Identify and Inspire

Table 4: Identify and Inspire

| Action Theme | What will we do and why? | How will we do it? | Who will do it? | When will we do it? |
|-----------------------------|---|--|--|---|
| Identify and Inspire | 18. Work in partnership with governing bodies of sport and sport clubs to recruit, train and support a Mental Health Officer. | <p>a. Draw up role descriptions and specifications for identified positions, including key skills and aptitudes.</p> <p>b. Identify specific training needs, and coordinate across the sports sector whenever possible.</p> <p>c. Produce relevant mental health awareness documentation for use by governing bodies of sport.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sport Northern Ireland - Public Health Agency - Wellbeing in Sport Implementation Group - Governing bodies of sport - Sport Northern Ireland - Northern Ireland Sports Forum - Public Health Agency - Public Health Agency - Sport Northern Ireland - Wellbeing in Sport Implementation Group | <p>By March 2019 and ongoing</p> <p>By March 2019 and ongoing</p> <p>By June 2019 and ongoing</p> |

Table 4: Identify and Inspire

| Action Theme | What will we do and why? | How will we do it? | Who will do it? | When will we do it? |
|-----------------------------|---|--|--|---------------------------------|
| Identify and Inspire | <p>19. Identify 'Mental Health Champions' within the sports sector to tell their story and inspire others to seek help (if required).</p> | <p>a. Work with governing bodies of sport to select appropriate Mental Health Champions.</p> <p>b. Arrange regular meetings with Mental Health Champions for networking, engagement and support.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sport Northern Ireland - Northern Ireland Sports Forum - Governing bodies of sport - Sport Northern Ireland - Northern Ireland Sports Forum - Governing bodies of sport | <p>By June 2019 and ongoing</p> |

Read about programmes and how the Action Plan has contributed to their enhancement and impact

CASE STUDY 4 - SCHOOLS EDUCATIONAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING WEEK, ULSTER RUGBY

Ulster Rugby hosted a Cross-Community Health and Wellbeing Week, funded by the Public Health Agency, involving 447 pupils from 15 post-primary schools. The programme educated pupils on aspects of physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing by engaging in both practical and information-based workshops addressing three key themes; mental resilience and positive mindset, physical activity, and nutrition.

“Our involvement with the Mental Health and Wellbeing in Sport Strategy Group over the past two years have made us increasingly aware of the potential benefit of delivering mental health awareness programmes to sporting organisations and has given us the incentive to begin developing and piloting such programmes.”



4. IDENTIFY AND INSPIRE

CASE STUDY 5 - TACKLING AWARENESS OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES (TAMHI), BELFAST

TAMHI is a charity set up to work with sport groups willing to use the power of sport to promote Positive Mental Fitness. Their most successful programme, ‘Sport Schools in the Community’, encourages young people to open up about mental health issues, and seek help. It has stopped bullying which particularly affects youth mental health.

Between September 2017 and May 2018 22 6th year pupils were trained in North Belfast and they successfully delivered the mental wealth games to 232 young people. The aim was to champion ‘Take 5’ steps to wellbeing and anti bullying. It received significant engagement on facebook, and all 22 leaders reported increases in resilience. 86% of pupils taking part gained knowledge from the session with pre / post understanding of Take 5 increasing, and four young people got help as they opened up about bullying.

This programme, thanks to its success, has secured funding to not only sustain the programme in two schools but also to broaden to four schools.



4. IDENTIFY AND INSPIRE

How will we measure progress?

This Action Plan is fundamentally about encouraging and facilitating a collaborative approach to increase awareness and understanding of mental health and wellbeing in sport. The result ('outcome') we are aiming for is articulated in the Vision:

“That everyone involved in sport is aware of the importance of looking after their mental health, and that of others, leading to a healthier lifestyle and positive wellbeing.”

There will be many challenges in the delivery of this Action Plan, one being that no single individual or organisation can be solely responsible for achieving our shared longer term outcomes. However, this challenge is also an opportunity as it requires us all to sustain the collective and collaborative ethos that has characterised the development of this Action Plan to date. By working together across sectors and across organisations, sharing responsibility for results, and continually engaging with the longer term vision, we will breathe life into outcome-based accountability.

In a climate of constrained public sector investment, this Action Plan requires that all partners and stakeholders involved in its delivery make the best use of existing structures and resources. In that context, it is envisaged that the monitoring of this Action Plan's implementation should be aligned to existing frameworks such as Sport Matters: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-2019, and the Northern Ireland's Executive's draft Programme for Government. The Action Plan and the research that has informed its development will also serve to inform the next Strategy for Physical Activity and Sport (2020-2030) to ensure real impact for the sporting community.

**A barrier to mental health help-seeking in sport is stigma.
(Hughes & Leavey, 2012)**

The Northern Ireland Wellbeing in Sport Forum proposed within the Plan affords an opportunity to provide that linkage and will be responsible for developing a Performance Management Framework (PMF) detailing the indicators of success and performance measures that will show whether people and organisations are better off, and there is impact as a result of the delivery of the Plan.

The Action Plan has a proposed timeframe of five years in the first instance (2018 - 2023). As previously stated, no single individual or organisation has the capacity to meet the cost of its implementation. A truly collaborative investment model must be adopted where existing resources will be shared and thereby used more efficiently. It is likely that Executive Departments and Arms Length Bodies will bid for additional resources, as opportunities arise, and the Forum will actively explore and seek to secure support from alternative streams e.g. local authorities and Lottery monies.

**A short 75-minute student athlete mental health awareness program when delivered by experienced facilitators can increase knowledge of mental health, including knowledge of mental disorders.
(Breslin et al, 2017)**



Appendices

Appendix 1

Mental Health and Wellbeing in Sport Strategy Group Membership

| |
|---|
| Dr John Kremer - Independent Chairperson |
| Dr Paul Donnelly - Sport Northern Ireland |
| Dr Gavin Breslin - Ulster University |
| Tandy Haughey - Ulster University |
| Fiona Teague - Public Health Agency |
| Helen Gibson - Public Health Agency |
| Robert Heyburn - Department for Communities |
| Tom McEnaney - Aware NI |
| Beth Gibb - Action Mental Health |
| Nuala Dalcz - Inspire (from 18-04-2018) |
| Joe Donnelly - Tackling Awareness Mental Health Issues (TAMHI) |
| Ciaran Kearney - Northern Ireland Sports Forum |
| Paul Stephenson - NSPCC - Child Protection in Sport Unit |
| Chris Shields - Ulster Rugby |
| Kerry Spence - Ulster Rugby |
| Keith Gibson - Irish Football Association |
| Maura McMenamin - Ulster Council Gaelic Athletic Association |
| Kate Hills - Swim Ireland |
| Dr Gary Woods - Consultant Psychiatrist |
| Angharad Bunt - Sport Northern Ireland |
| Nicola Algie - Sport Northern Ireland (from 22-02-2018) |
| Lisa Beattie - Sport Northern Ireland (from 18-11-2017) |
| Alan Curran - Sport Northern Ireland |

APPENDIX 2

Wellbeing in Sport Action Plan - Research, Public Engagement and Consultation

Mental Health and Wellbeing in Sport: A Pilot Educational programme for Clubs

135 adults (coaches and volunteers) received programme:

- 23 sports / clubs
- 27 paid coaches, 41 volunteer coaches, and 59 involved in management or volunteer
- 109 adults (coaches and volunteers) control: 53 paid coaches, 48 volunteer coaches, and 8 involved in management or volunteering

Focus Group Responses

- 2 focus groups
- Individual volunteers, from basketball, football and hockey

Review - Interviews and Focus Groups

26 participants took part (20 male; 6 female) consisted of:

- 17 (14 face-to-face at House of Sport and 3 telephone)
- 2 focus groups
(1 House of Sport; 4 participants from NGB's, 1 Girdwood Community Hub; 5 participants from local football community)

Demographic information for responding organisations:

- Instonians Rugby Club (South)
- Knockbracken Golf Academy (South)
- Castlereagh Hills Golf Club (South)
- Colin Valley Golf Club (West)
- St Johns GAA (West)
- St Georges Boxing Clubs (City Centre)
- City of Belfast Boxing Club (East)
- Glentoran FC (East)
- North Down Boxing Club
- Cairn Lodge Boxing Club (North)
- Cliftonville Ladies FC (North)
- Ophir RFC, Newtownabbey
- Ballyearl Golf Club, Newtownabbey
- Monkstown Boxing Club
- Randalstown RFC
- Coleraine FC
- Strabane RFC
- Doire Trasna GAA, Derry

APPENDIX 2 (CONTINUED)

- Laganview Golf Club, Lisburn
- Newry Town RFC
- Warrenpoint FC
- Tir Na Nog GAA, Portadown
- Killeavy GAA
- St Patricks GAA, Omagh
- Ballinamallard FC

Organisations / stakeholders involved:

- Action Mental Health
- Athletics Northern Ireland
- Aware
- Cumann Spóirt an Phobail
- Department for Communities
- Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA)
- Irish Football Association (IFA)
- National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
- Netball Northern Ireland
- Northern Ireland Sports Forum
- Old Boys Football Club
- PIPs Newry and Mourne
- Professional Golfers Association (PGA)
- Psychiatrist
- Public Health Agency (PHA)
- Sport and Exercise Psychology
- Sport Institute Northern Ireland (High Performance Sport)
- Sport Northern Ireland (Policy Development, Programme Delivery and Evaluation)
- St Malachy's Old Boys Youth Football Club
- St Patrick's Football Club
- Swim Ireland
- Tackling Awareness of Mental Health Issues (TAMHI's)
- Ulster Badminton
- Ulster Rugby
- Student Athletes

APPENDIX 2 (CONTINUED)

Public Consultations

Six public consultations were held:

- Five venues across Northern Ireland from 3rd April-10 May 2017
- 1. Girdwood Belfast
- 2. Foyle Arena Derry
- 3. Assembly Buildings Belfast
- 4. Craigavon Civic Centre
- 5. Ballymena Showgrounds
- 83 attendees (49 Male; 34 Female)
- 73 clubs /organisations /individuals represented

Organisations

- Crumlin Star
- Holy Family Boxing Club
- Street Soccer NI
- St Patricks Football Club
- S.A.M.H.I
- Albert Foundry Football Club
- PIPS
- St Malachys Old Boys
- 22nd Old Boys Football Club
- 22nd Ladies Football Club
- Sporting Belfast
- Cliftonville Ladies Football Club
- Maiden City Soccer
- ASPIRE programme
- Ulster Hockey
- Foyle Cycling Club
- Inspire Mental Health
- Derry City and Strabane District Council
- Ulster University
- Strabane Training Services
- Waterside Women's Centre
- Greater Shantallow Area Partnership
- The Clear Project
- Western Health and Social Care Trust
- Foyle Valley Athletics Club
- Eglinton Community Ltd

APPENDIX 2 (CONTINUED)

- City of Derry Spartans
- Triangle Judo Club
- YMCA / Derry Vipers American Football
- Derry Vipers American Football
- SDLP / DCSDC
- Springwell Running
- MH student Club - Ulster University
- Na Magha Hurling Club
- Nexus NI
- Newry, Mourne and Down District Council
- Ulster Tennis
- CI - Knock Bowling Club
- The Rainbow Project
- County Antrim Boxing
- Boys and Girls Club (NI)
- Dept of Agriculture, Environment
- Inland Fisheries
- Royal Yachting Association Northern Ireland (RYANI)
- Live Active NI
- Special Olympics
- Inspire
- Athletics NI
- South Belfast Area - Project Education Authority
- Canoe Association of NI
- Angel Eyes NI
- East Belfast Mission
- St Marys GAC
- Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
- Live Active NI
- Irish Football Association (IFA)
- Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU)
- IRFU (Ulster Branch)
- Lurgan Tennis Club
- British Horse Society (Dressage Ireland)
- Health Promotion Department
- Education Welfare Officer
- WSK Judo Club
- Irish Athletic Boxing Association
- South Antrim Community Network (SACN)

APPENDIX 2 (CONTINUED)

- Coleraine RFCC
- Fresh Little Minds
- Mallusk Harriers
- East Antrim Rifle and Pistol Club
- Ballymena Runners
- Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

Note: The public consultations were facilitated by Dr Gavin Breslin, Tandy Haughey and Dr Paul Donnelly.

Summary of Consultation responses

Strategy Development

- The Strategy / Action Plan could link to other existing strategies - specifically district council community and other departmental plans.
- Language in the Strategy / Action Plan should be suitable for all within the community to understand.
- Development of a one-page action plan for governing bodies of sport and clubs.
- Integration into the current Clubmark / Kitemark Schemes in governing bodies of sport.
- Build on work currently underway on leadership and integrate wellbeing into this.
- Identification of role models to show mental health is important to everyone, this would tackle mental health stigma.
- In conjunction with other initiatives, to ensure the availability of a mental health and wellbeing trained workforce to educate those involved in sport.
- Production of a mental health and wellbeing toolkit relevant to the needs of those involved in sport.
- Identification of funding opportunities to assist communities to develop mental health in sport initiatives.
- Enabling sports clubs to act in a signposting role to professional support.

APPENDIX 2 (CONTINUED)

Resourcing the Strategy / Action Plan

- Maintain the Mental Health and Wellbeing in Sport Strategy to provide overall leadership and governance.
- Train the existing paid and volunteer workforce in sport.
- Develop specific mental health in sport resources and toolkits, linking with agencies that are currently delivering mental health promotion.
- Examine potential funding opportunities for the strategy / action plan.
- Build partnerships - area alliances, learning networks and sports forums - develop community planning to share the costs of the strategy / action plan.
- Address the mental health and wellbeing training gap within current coaching qualifications.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Programmes

- There was an overwhelming view that there is a requirement for mental health awareness programmes and advice required for participants, leaders, coaches, administrators, and volunteers.
- A standardised communication pack should be developed to support sporting organisations.
- A social media campaign that shows an awareness of the culture of sport should be launched to raise awareness of positive mental health and available interventions.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Officer

- Each sports club should appoint a Mental Health and Wellbeing Officer.
- It was felt that there should be a Regional Officer who was the overall contact person for each officer in the sports club when a mental health issue was to arise. This could be an integrated service linked to existing regional mental health training personnel.
- Accredited or certified training was suggested best for the Mental Health and Wellbeing officer, this was to ensure they had the correct skill set for the position.
- It was felt that if a governing body person takes on the role it should be a paid position.
- For the development of officers, a similar approach to that of the current Safeguarding Officer in the sports club could be considered.

APPENDIX 3

Wellbeing in Sport Action Plan - Timeline

Project initiation phase:

January 2016 - March 2016

- Strategy Group engagement
- Project planning and goal setting

Pre-consultation phase:

March 2016 - November 2017

- Desk-based research
- Evaluation of 'Mental Health and Wellbeing in Sport: A Pilot Educational Programme for Clubs'
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Intervention in Sport: A Review and Recommendation
- One-to-one stakeholder engagement

Public engagement and consultation phase:

April 2017 - May 2017

- Girdwood Community Centre, Belfast
- Foyle Arena, Derry/Londonderry
- Assembly Buildings, Belfast
- Craigavon Civic Centre, Craigavon
- Ballymena Showgrounds, Ballymena

Drafting phase:

September 2017 - May 2018

- Strategy Group analysis of public engagement and consultation information
- Strategy Group Action Plan and vision development

Approval and completion phase:

May - September 2018

- Final public consultation
- Action Plan revisions

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USEFUL CONTACTS

If you are or someone you know is in distress or despair, call **LIFELINE** on 0808 808 8000 or visit: **www.lifelinehelpline.info**

Samaritans is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for anyone struggling to cope. Call the free helpline on 116 123.

In crisis go to or contact the **Emergency Department** of your nearest general hospital if someone is in immediate danger. You can also contact the emergency services by calling 999 or 112.

Contact a **local GP** or **GP out of hours service**. A GP can give you advice and information on support available to you.

www.mindingyourhead.info has information on mental health and the supports and services in Northern Ireland.

www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/directory-services-help-improve-mental-health-and-emotional-wellbeing provides information on support available in each of the five Health and Social Care Trust areas.





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